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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR S/WCI PROSPER, WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SPEAKING OUT IN COSTA RICA ON GITMO AND DETAINEES

REF: STATE 142348

1. (SBU) Per reftel instructions, Charge and A/DCM discussed reftel points at length with Foreign Minister Tovar on August 1, and left a copy with him as a non-paper. We will follow up with other officials at the Foreign Ministry as well as with the Ministry of Public Security where our common interests in preventing terrorists from operating in Costa Rica provide a great deal of understanding for our detainee policy.

2. (SBU) Charge also convened select members of the country team to review our efforts to ensure that Costa Rican policy and opinion makers have an accurate understanding of the military necessity and security rationale for U.S. detainee operations. Costa Rica's traditional neutrality and perception of itself as a strong defender of human rights on the international stage, combined with a deep-seated suspicion of all things military, make it a difficult target for generating broad public support for operations such as those at Guantanamo. Policy makers on the other hand, are much more open to our explanations. This dynamic was dramatically displayed last year when President Pacheco readily agreed to politically support the Iraq Coalition only to be forced to withdraw that "support" when overwhelming public opposition resulted in a ruling by the Constitutional Court that the President's policy was inconsistent with Costa Rican neutrality.

3. (SBU) The Guantanamo detainee issue has largely remained out of the spotlight in Costa Rica. Costa Rican newspaper coverage of allegations of Koran abuse at Guantanamo, for example, was minor and usually included our information on measures in place to prevent any such abuse. Another positive sign is the relative lack of editorial commentary in the wake of such allegations. The editorial tone at the leading daily "La Nacion" has remained quite balanced: acknowledging that the Global War on Terror is necessary and gently reminding the U.S. that it is also a human rights leader. Post will continue to press our points on national leaders and opinion makers in order to ensure positive or benign coverage of the Guantanamo detainee issue.

KAPLAN